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ABSTRACT

The status of the sociology of sport within the discipline of sociology is explored. Review of the subfield since 1971 indicates an increase in the number of publications and communication relating to sport sociology topics. It is hypothesized, however, that sport sociology will not in the near future receive equal acceptance within sociology with other substantive subfields. A 1976 random survey of members of the American Sociological Association to determine relative rank of subfields revealed that sport (including leisure and recreation) ranked 35th out of the 36 subfields listed. Further analysis indicated that members combined their belief that sport sociology has a marginal status in sociology with the conviction that it has the potential for interdisciplinary analysis. Many researchers who develop an academic interest in sport have sport backgrounds, are oriented toward applied sociology, and are comparatively new to the field of sociology. Sport sociology will become more acceptable if researchers become change agents who gain support of opinion leaders within professional organizations and academic departments and if they are able to encourage addition of sport-related topics to the sociology curriculum. It is concluded that sport sociology will not achieve full maturity as a subfield until it attains an identity (specific research area and a group of sociologists who do research on the topic) and is defined by the larger field of sociology as a legitimate area of inquiry. (DB)

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SPORT SOCIOLOGY AND THE DISCIPLINE OF SOCIOLOGY: PRESENT STATUS AND SPECULATIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE*

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Sport Sociology And The Discipline of Sociology: Present Status And Speculations About The Future

In a recent monograph McPherson, Loy, and Kenyon (1978) have traced the development of sociology of sport in North America over the past two decades. Utilizing Mullins' (1973) developmental stages described for scientific specialties, they outlined the transition of sport sociology through the following stages:

> Toward a sociology of sport: The "normal stage" (1951-1964)
>
> Missionary work and social criticists: "The network stage" (1965-1972)
>
> Empirical explorations and theoretical excursions: The "cluster stage" (1972-1978).

This developmental process is characterized by an increase in publications and informal and formal communication within a subfield. Rothman (1971) has proposed a similar framework of developmental stages by which new theories, concepts, methodologies, and research findings are assimilated into a discipline. According to Loy and associates, a subdiscipline such as sport sociology cannot achieve the fourth stage of full maturity as an academic specialty until two additional conditions are met:

> First, it must attain an identity. That is, it must be a research area with a distinctive subject matter and there must be a group of specialists who maintain social ties and think of themselves as participants in a "social circle." Second, it must be defined by the larger field

> as a legitimate area of inquiry, and integrated into the social structure of the discipline (Sackmary, 1974, vii, cited in Loy, et al., 1978:39).

Sociology of sport has partly achieved the first criterion--an identity; for example, over the last decade the subfield has become more visible within general sociology through regular sessions and round table discussions at international, national and regional meetings. Nevertheless, Loy and associates argue that sport sociology has not yet been "defined as a legitimate area of inquiry within general sociology or other academic domains owing to problems associated with critical mass, academic status, and ideological orientations" (1978:40).

We would like to use the Loy, McPherson, and Kenyon monograph as a point of departure for extending the analysis of the relationship between sociology and the subfield of sport sociology. First, we shall focus on the present status of sociology of sport; secondly, we offer two theoretical perspectives--diffusion of innovation and aspects of organization theory--that might be linked toward a more comprehensive understanding of the future relationship between sport sociology and its parent discipline.

The Status of Sociology of Sport

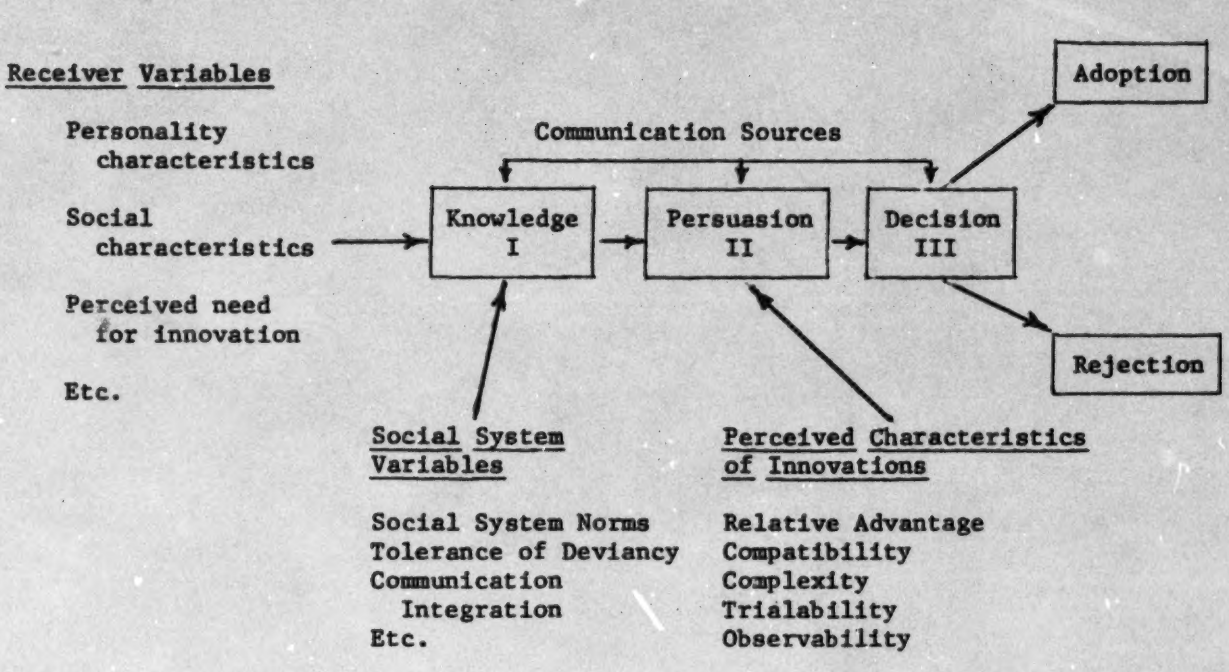
Sport sociology clearly lacks recognition as a legitimate subfield. Slater and Jacobson (1976) surveyed a random sample of the American Sociological Association membership in 1973 to determine the relative rank of the subfields. Based on average rankings, "Leisure, Sports, Recreation, and Arts" ranked 35th out of the 36 subfields listed (Sociology of Education was 34th and Rural Sociology was 36th). It is interesting to note

that both sociology of education and sport sociology have the potential for "interdisciplinary analysis" and "cross-fertilization of ideas" which are desirable qualities; yet both have a marginal status in general sociology. Interestingly, even sociology of education pays little heed to sport sociology. For example, while much sport behavior is carried out within educational systems, there is little awareness or recognition of the educational aspects of athletics by the writers of books and articles in this closely related subfield. This lack of consciousness continues while ignoring the fact that athletic trophies are prominently showcased in the hallways of most schools, students of both sexes proudly display their letter jackets, school activities are filled with athletic events, and students are socialized into sport roles. In short, within educational institutions sport is a major subsystem that receives an extensive allocation of time, energy, money and personnel; yet this behavioral complex is largely neglected by scholars in the sociology of education. In our content analysis of a dozen prominent books in the sociology of education, we found virtually no references to the sources cited in Table 1 that focus specifically on sport and academic orientations. Other aspects of sport and social behavior within school settings are similarly ignored in the sociology of education literature. It is true, of course, that some of the articles cited in Table 1 are recent publications, and there is a lag time before they can be picked up in the text materials. Furthermore, we do not know whether this lack of recognition of the sociological aspects of sport behavior within school systems is a consequence of not knowing about this body of knowledge (i.e., a lack of communication) or whether this literature is perceived as not worthy of inclusion in sociology of education.

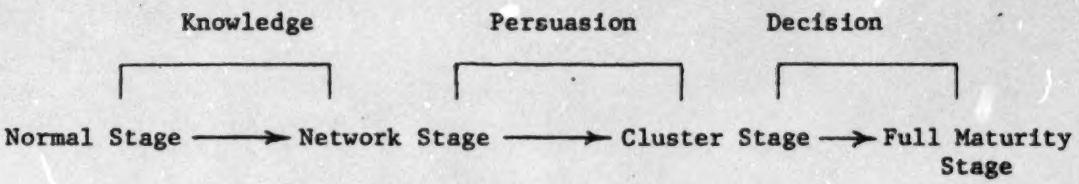
Table 1 About Here

The Adoption of an Innovation: Sociology of Sport

In our presentation thus far we have pointed out that sociology of sport has progressed through several stages of growth. Yet it is evidently not a legitimate subfield alongside other institutional areas of sociology (e.g., family, religion, education). In short, sport sociology is a relatively new (i.e., innovative) subject area that has not been fully accepted (or adopted) by the larger discipline. The factors which might explain this lack of acceptance remain unclear; we suggest that the diffusion of innovations may provide a theoretical perspective for examining this relationship. Admittedly, much of the research in this area has focused on the social psychological characteristics of innovators (Rogers, 1962; also, see Loy, 1966; 1969 for the application of this approach to the adoption of new techniques in sport). Nevertheless, the diffusion of an idea or a technique may also be considered as occurring among individuals within social systems--e.g., villages (Kivlin, Fliegel, Roy and Sen, 1971) and professional organizations (Counte and Kimberly, 1974). We believe this paradigm offers a framework for analyzing the relationship between a new subfield (sociology of sport) and an established discipline. For heuristic purposes we present a modified diffusion-decision model as outlined by Rogers and Shoemaker (1971:102):



The relationship between the stages of development in sport sociology and the diffusion model might be illustrated as follows:



It is not our intention to examine in detail the manner in which this paradigm applies to the process of acceptance, adoption and legitimation of sport sociology; however, we shall highlight several aspects of the process for illustrative purposes.

Antecedents. We suspect that persons who have developed an academic interest in sport have distinctive personal and social characteristics. For

example, we suggest that an unusually large percentage of these scholars have been involved in (socialized into) sport as participants. Moreover, we would hypothesize that sociologists who have had aversive socialization experiences with sport and perceive themselves to be "nonathletic" would show little interest in the study of sport behavior. It is also possible that sport sociologists are more "applied" in their orientation to sociology. It is also likely that an individual's age and level of achievement in a core discipline affect one's interest in, and receptivity to, development of a new subfield. In short, establishment scholars are likely to be less open to innovative subfields within a discipline--such as elites in general tend to adhere to the status quo.

Process. The process component incorporates the stages along the innovation-decision continuum that includes knowledge, persuasion, and decision. These steps in the adoption chain are linked together by sources of communication. To further illustrate the model for the "adoption" of sport sociology, we provide a brief explication of several social system variables. In this context it is relevant to note that the subfields within sociology (and the practitioners thereof) are implicitly competing for scarce resources--professional prestige, convention sections, journal space, grants, course offerings in a curriculum, and student enrollments. We have already noted the relatively low status of the subfield. Dunning (1967) has argued that sociologists tend to define play and sport as fantasy and as "not serious" and are, therefore, ambivalent about seriously studying the topic. They may also be reflecting the Protestant Ethic orientation toward work and leisure; that is, it is permissible to study work but not play, sport,

and leisure. Stone (1971) has suggested that an element of snobbery is probably involved: "The serious analysis of popular sport is construed to be beneath the dignity of many academics" (1971:62). Within the larger discipline sport sociology is sometimes defined as physical education and outside the boundaries of sociology, or as one colleague remarked, "What do you do for a final exam, shoot free-throws?" In summary, the social system norms influence individuals' access to knowledge and awareness of the subfield.

At the persuasion stage on the continuum, individuals are aware of an innovation and develop favorable or unfavorable attitudes about adoption. Once they become psychologically involved with the idea, they may seek more information from various communication sources and interpret the information received (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971:109). That is, they develop an awareness of sport sociology, and the relationship between the subfield and the larger discipline may now be located on the continuum at a point between the persuasion and decision stages. At this time the subfield has gained some identity (it is known), and the interactions that are now taking place between the subfield and the larger discipline will determine its ultimate acceptance within sociology. Thus, if a critical mass of sport sociologists emerges, respectable publications, and an accommodation of ideological differences, these changes will promote the observability and perceived compatibility of sport sociology with the larger discipline.

Speculations About the Future

Within the foreseeable future, it is unlikely that sport sociology will receive equal acceptance within sociology on a par with other substantive

subfields--marriage and the family, criminology, urban, medical, political, etc. Nevertheless, we offer some projections into the future concerning the relationship between sport sociology and the larger discipline. Our speculations are embedded in two frameworks from general sociology--diffusion of innovations and complex organizations.

To gain a fuller understanding of the present status of sport sociology, it is necessary to grasp the Janus-faced nature of the subfield--one side of its face bearing the physiognomy of sociology while the other side resembles physical education. In some respects the subfield is enhanced by the interdisciplinary nature of the subject matter. Sport provides a unique opportunity for sociological field studies, and the interdisciplinary conventions provide a lively and exciting exchange of ideas and concepts. Furthermore, the recent emergence of interdisciplinary journals provides opportunities for a synthesis of theoretical perspectives and concomitant scholarly growth. Nevertheless, the overlap between sport sociology and physical education has also created problems. For example, the physical educators may have difficulty maintaining currency in sociological literature and professional affiliations because of parallel pressures to maintain their professional development in their own subfields such as motor learning, exercise physiology, and biomechanics. Furthermore, since sociology of sport may be offered in both physical education and sociology departments, its visibility (observability) and impact both within physical education and sociology tend to be attenuated. Additionally, the lack of communication between physical education and sociology may not provide an effective intellectual exchange; thus we frequently find sociologists who are unaware of the appropriate literature published in the physical education literature and vice versa.

Diffusion of Innovations Model. Turning to specific aspects of the diffusion of innovations model, an important role is often played by the change agent who functions as a communication link between social systems (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971:228). In speculating about the future of sociology of sport, we might look to several possible change agents who could introduce information into the persuasion-decision stages of the innovation model. One such change agent is the publishing companies and their sales representatives. Recently there has been a spate of textbooks and anthologies in sociology of sport. The publishers' advertisements and their representatives provide an important communication source in promoting academic specialization. The publishers' representatives also serve as an important source of communication between university departments concerning curricular offerings and textbook selections at other institutions.

In the present study the innovators are identified as the practitioners of sport sociology who are interested in promoting its acceptance as a legitimate subfield in general sociology. To promote this cause it is necessary to gain the support of the opinion leaders of the social system, i.e., a specific department and/or professional organization. Thus, the innovator can suggest that courses be taught and convention sessions on the topic be presented. If the practitioner is also an opinion leader, he or she can lend credibility to the subject; for example, the acceptance of sociology of sport might be furthered by a prestigious sociologist becoming associated with the subfield. This process would also be enhanced by the publication of sophisticated research efforts in sociology of sport in the very top sociological journals.

Rogers and Shoemaker (1971:102) list five factors that can influence perceptions of innovation. Previous research indicates that these perceived characteristics of innovations are likely to be important in the rate of adoption:

1. Relative advantage. In the present context, individuals and departments would assess the advantage of sport sociology as an area for teaching and research. Typically, established teachers and researchers will weigh the costs of changing or incorporating another specialty into their academic repertoire. Sociology departments would need to assess the potential gains and losses that may result from its inclusion into the curriculum. The prospective enrollment gain from courses in sport sociology are likely to outweigh concerns about disciplinary purity during the present era of economic stringency.
2. Compatibility. The more compatible sport sociology is with the existing values, norms and practices of the department and the larger discipline, the greater the likelihood it will be accepted as a legitimate subject offering. The mere offering of an occasional course would not constitute a serious threat to the existing curriculum. However, if a subprogram in sport sociology is proposed, other programs are threatened, and the incompatibility of the revision becomes apparent. If sport sociology is deemed contrary to the values of sociology in general, its acceptance and legitimation is unlikely.

3. Complexity. The greater the program of offerings in the subfield and the number of personnel involved, the greater the cost. If sociology of sport is perceived as readily offered within the existing staff and course offerings, it has a greater potential for acceptance. The complexity criterion would not appear to be a serious obstacle to the offering of a given course or two in sport sociology; however, the implementation of a program in sports studies would receive considerable resistance within most academic settings today.

4. Trialability. This characteristic refers to the degree to which an innovation can be tried on an experimental basis. An innovation that is "trialable" is less risky and is usually positively related to its adoption. No major adjustments in the social system are necessary for trying it out on a temporary basis. This criterion suggests no serious obstacle to the adoption of sport sociology courses within the academy.

5. Observability. Observability is the degree to which results of an innovation are visible to others. Observability is generally positively related to its acceptance. As was noted earlier in this paper, if researchers in sociology of sport produce quality research in prestigious publications, this visibility will promote legitimation and acceptance (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971:138-158; Corwin,

1974:321-322). Two recent articles on sport sociology in the American Sociological Review augur well on this criterion of adoption (Ball, 1976; Lever, 1978).

The diffusion of innovations framework is helpful in conceptualizing the antecedent variables and communication processes that promote the diffusion of innovation (acceptance of the subfield) through the stages of knowledge, persuasion, and decision. There are, however, other external factors that are important to acknowledge in speculating about the future of sociology of sport--that is, the broader societal and demographic changes that impinge upon sociology. When one reads The American Sociologist and Footnotes, the primary attention today within the profession focuses on maintenance of the status quo in the face of declining enrollments and an oversupply of trained sociologists. Thus, one sees articles and reports examining the ramifications and possibilities of nonacademic employment and applied program offerings within traditional sociology departments. For example, in recent years we can observe the increase in departmental offerings in criminal justice, gerontology, and social service. How will these broad societal changes affect the teaching and research in sociology of sport? On the one hand, we might suppose that under the exigency of fewer students and economic cutbacks, the curriculum will also need to be trimmed to "barebone" core courses. Yet, on the other hand, we may find that sociology departments will seek to offer the "sociologies" most attractive to students. In this regard sport sociology could be a means of attracting more student credit hours as a supplement to the traditional sociology courses. Indeed, sociologists should not discount the pervasiveness of sport in our society and the present emphasis on health, fitness, and leisure

activities and the spillover effects of these trends to the growth of sport sociology. In general, we would suggest that the societal trend toward life-long leisure sports creates a favorable situation for sociologists specializing in sport--both in academic as well as nonacademic settings.

Organizational Theory Model. Since we are dealing with the inclusion of new subject matter in the curriculum, we feel that there are aspects of organizational theory that go beyond the diffusion of innovation approach. By linking the perspectives of innovation and organization theory, we may achieve a greater understanding of the contextual variables applicable to curriculum development. For example, in the previous paragraph we outlined some of the social changes that are impinging on sociology departments resulting in curricular alterations and new programs. When we examine these events utilizing Etzioni's (1961) typology of complex organizations, it seems that universities and colleges are shifting from a culture-type organization with a moral-normative pattern to an economic-type with a renumerative-calculative pattern that is characteristic of factories and businesses. The latter model is more likely to establish priorities and goals based on economic inducements and cost savings rather than on purely educational values. The processes that are set into motion by this organizational shift have important consequences for the implementation of new curricular programs such as the sociology of sport.

If we are correct in assuming that institutions of higher education are shifting toward a more economic model, we can anticipate a greater competition for such scarce resources such as enrollments, staff positions, operating budgets, office space, library resources, secretarial service, typing of manuscripts, research funding, and favorable teaching loads.

Although the inclusion of a sport sociology course in the curriculum is not a major organizational change, the development of a sport studies program with several courses and a graduate level specialization would constitute a greater adjustment. Drawing on aspects of organizational theory applicable to academic change, the following assumptions and principles should be considered regarding the possibility of sport sociology being adopted within the curriculum (cf. Conrad, 1978).

1. Significant curricular change will invariably result in some conflict between innovators and defenders of the status quo. Moreover, change efforts will involve an exertion of power by these conflicting groups.

2. Colleges and universities are made up of a loose assemblage of formal and informal units with varying degrees of consensus on values and goals. Conflict is heightened as divergent faculty with differing vested interests seek to find the means for translating their objectives into curricular action and policy.

3. Administrative leadership may respond to interest-group pressures for change by invoking mechanisms for the reexamination of academic policy and thereby influence the impetus for change (e.g. review committees).

4. As interest groups exert power to achieve their goals, competing groups coalesce until two major interest groups emerge. Conflict is transformed into policy in the direction of the group exerting the most power. Since sport sociology is likely to be advocated by junior level faculty, the balance of power would appear to be tilted against adoption of this innovation.

These assumptions and principles that were drawn from studies of change within complex organizations are not assumed to be universal. However, we

offer them as indicative of the social processes that affect innovative efforts within institutions of higher education. The prospects for adoption of sport sociology within the academy will be influenced by these organizational processes.

Summary and Conclusions

Previous writers who have focused on the interrelationship between the sociology of sport and the parent discipline have generally taken one of two approaches: first, that sociology of sport is not ready for legitimation within the discipline of sociology because the research is inadequate, lacks theoretical and methodological sophistication, and because a critical mass of competent sociologists is lacking in the subfield; secondly, it is argued that sport sociology lacks a mature status because mainline sociologists fail to recognize the contributions of sport sociology and are supercilious toward this fledgling subfield.

It is apparent that the sociology of sport does not enjoy a status as a mature subfield. However, we suggest a need to examine this state of affairs by widening the theoretical net beyond observations about the weaknesses of the subfield and resistance from orthodox sociologists. Achievement of the status of a mature subfield would involve an acceptance or adoption of the subject area at the individual, departmental-organizational, and associational levels. In this paper we outlined two frameworks that offer a broader insight into the present and future relationship between the subfield and its parent discipline. The diffusion of innovation framework provides insight into antecedent and processual factors that are important in the process of social change. A second perspective is the theory

of complex organizations. The adoption of an innovation such as sport sociology takes place not only in the minds of people but within the curricular structure of sociology departments and programs within colleges and universities. Therefore, we noted several propositions drawn from the study of complex organizations that can be considered in assessing the future of sport sociology.

We have not succeeded in integrating the propositions of these two theoretical frameworks. Rather, our objective was to raise the level of discussion beyond personalisms, minority group paranoia, and self-recriminations toward a more structural understanding of the relationship between sport sociology and the larger discipline. In our discussion, we have analyzed the issue from the standpoint of sociology and one of its subfields; we do not suggest that our analysis applies to sport studies programs affiliated with schools of physical education. Further, investigation of the adoption process in colleges of education would be welcome. Hopefully, our attempts to examine the topic at hand will provide insights as to how proponents of sport sociology might contribute to the maturation of the subfield. One suggestion we might offer is to let our scholarly works be of such quality that they speak for themselves. Political advocacy and lobbying are not the route to intellectual parity of a subfield.

Table 1. Research Studies in Sport and Academic Orientation Appropriate for Sociology of Education

Sport and Academic Orientation	Research Studies
	S. Birrell. "An analysis of the inter-relationships among achievement motivation, athletic participation, academic achievement, and educational aspirations." International Journal of Sport Psychology, 1977, 8: 178-191.
	H. Buhrmann. "Scholarship and athletics in junior high school." International Review of Sport Sociology, 1972, 7: 119-131.
	M. Hanks and B. Eckland. "Athletics and social participation in the educational process." Sociology of Education, 1976, 49: 271-294.
	W. Hauser and L. Lueptow. "Participation in athletics and academic achievement: A replication and extension." The Sociological Quarterly, 1978, 19: 304-309.
	L. Lueptow and B. Kayser. "Athletic involvement: Academic achievement and aspiration." Sociological Focus, 1973-1974, 7: 24-36.
	L. Otto. "Extracurricular activities in the educational attainment process." Rural Sociology, 1975, 40: 162-176.
	L. Otto, and D. Alwin. "Athletics, aspirations, and attainments." Sociology of Education, 1977, 42: 102-113.
	J. Phillips and W. Schafer. "Consequences of participation in interscholastic sports." Pacific Sociological Review, 1971, 14: 328-338.
	J. S. Picou. "Race, athletic achievement, and educational aspiration." The Sociological Quarterly, 1978, 19: 429-438.
	J. S. Picou and E. Curry. "Residence and athletic participation-aspiration hypothesis." Social Science Quarterly, 1974, 55: 768-776.
	R. Rehberg. "Behavior and attitudinal consequences of high school interscholastic sports: A speculative consideration." Adolescence, 1969, 4: 68-88.
	R. Rehberg and W. Schafer. "Participation in interscholastic athletics and college expectations." American Journal of Sociology, 1968, 73: 732-740.

Table 1 - continued

Sport and Academic Orientation	Research Studies

W. Schafer and M. Armer. "Athletes are not inferior students." Transaction, 1968, 5: 21-26, 61-62.

W. Schafer and R. Rehberg. "Athletic participation, college aspirations and college encouragement." Pacific Sociological Review, 1970, 13: 182-186.

E. Snyder. "Athletic team involvement: educational plans and the coach-player relationship." Adolescence, 1975, 10, 193-300.

E. Snyder and E. Spreitzer. "Participation in sport as related to educational expectations among high school girls." Sociology of Education, 1977, 50: 47-55.

W. Spady. "Lament for the letterman: effects of peer status and extra-curricular activities on goals and achievement." American Journal of Sociology, 1970, 75: 680-702.

E. Spreitzer and M. Pugh. "Interscholastic athletics and educational expectations." Sociology of Education, 1973, 46: 171-182.

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